

# STORY OF A DEATH FORETOLD

The Coup against Salvador Allende,  
11 September 1973



OSCAR GUARDIOLA-RIVERA

B L O O M S B U R Y

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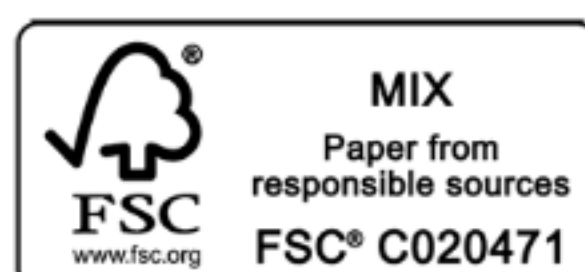
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Cochrane relied on these British merchants and financiers, people like George Edwards Brown, founder of the powerful Edwards clan, ‘to obtain considerable quantities of naval and military stores’, and persuaded them to pay a subscription towards his army in exchange for ‘protection and the creation of further commercial opportunities’.<sup>6</sup> Not only did this establish an important connection for the first time in Chile – between the financial health and survival of the Chilean government, on the one hand, and British and other foreign business interests on the other – but also it throws into relief another connection between the use of military force and the creation ‘of further commercial opportunities’ along with the opening of new markets.

Many things would change in Chile after Cochrane’s departure. The more prosperous urban sectors of the country would transform from old colonial backwaters into modern cities with electricity, sanitation, broad avenues, courts of law, a presidential palace, national poets and European pretensions. But such sectors and the late inheritors of the banking, transport and trading families would continue to relate to the southern regions inhabited by the Mapuche, or the northern regions full of natural resources, in a manner not too far removed from the way in which London would relate to Santiago and Valparaíso.

Force would be used time and again to grab land from the southern Mapuches or secure the exploitation of minerals in the north, thereby creating further opportunities for commerce and prosperity in the much-envied cities. Finally, the financial health and survival of the admired republican institutions of Chile would continue to depend on the prosperity of British (and thereafter other foreign) business interests.

The breakdown of this combined system of unequal relations would only begin when local politicians and the sectors of the population displaced in the south, migrants in the north and the main cities, and the youth of Chile, finally found such influences over their country and their personal lives intolerable.



This is the point where our story of death foretold begins in earnest. It will be told in three parts. Part I, ‘Precedents and Causes’, introduces the main characters – political cobblers, those they inspired, and the owners of Chile – taking the narrative up to the time of the Cold War (here termed, after W. H. Auden, ‘The Age of Anxiety’) and the 1960s and 1970s. Part II, ‘The Coup’, sets the leadership of the Chilean Way and the people who were its engine in the context of the interests of foreign and local powers. An image taken from a little-known novella by Argentinian writer Julio Cortázar serves to stage the drama that follows. The circumstances leading to and including the events of 11 September 1973 are described as a tragedy in three parts, loosely modelled on Sartre’s retelling of the drama of Orestes for the twentieth century. Part III deals with the aftermath of 11 September 1973 and its consequences, up to the political action of the youth of Chile between 2011 and 2013, striving to recover once again the ability to make history and tell the story in their own voice. This book is theirs.

I

# PRECEDENTS AND CAUSES





## I

# Outlaws and Political Cobblers

When he was a teenager, Salvador Allende used to visit the workshop of a cobbler named Juan Demarchi after classes at the Liceo Eduardo de la Barra in his native Valparaíso had finished for the day. Demarchi lived across the street from Allende. There they would play chess and talk about life. Allende would listen for hours to the sixty-three-year-old European immigrant whose stories amounted to a memoir of an entire class of people who lived on this planet but did not seem to share any part of it.

Telling their own stories was important, as it challenged the commonly held view that such people lacked in some fundamental way the equipment to acquire knowledge, govern themselves, and in short become fully human. Allegedly, others did possess such equipment, and that was supposed to justify their social advantage. At a time when for an ‘uneducated’ person to speak in the first person was first of all to claim that one was a person, such stories had profound significance. This was the case between the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries for peasants and artisans in Europe, as much as it was for indigenous peoples, descendants of Africans displaced during the years of slavery, and poor migrants in the Americas. They were not merely illegal. They were, in fact, outlaws living outside the walls of the lettered city, the polis, in short, the fully human. It was this significance that stunned the young Salvador Allende.<sup>1</sup>

Demarchi opened his library to Allende, who was soon an avid

It is no accident that from beginning to end, from Allende's first speeches during the turbulent years of student university politics to his very last words, the constant theme is that of equality, self-determination and independence. His lifelong aim was to show that the oppression which had closed off the lives of many in Chile and elsewhere – the enclosure of history's commons for the benefit of the few – not only produced negative effects, but also insights, and perhaps even a culture of engagement with the question of what and who has value and valid knowledge.<sup>5</sup>

To historians, the reputation of shoemakers and cobblers as worker-philosophers and militant egalitarians is as well known as it is old. In an essay included in his collection *Uncommon People*, Eric Hobsbawm described the historical role played by political shoemakers together with weavers and musicians such as the pioneers of jazz and other forms of popular music and culture, as thinkers and artisans of rebellion.<sup>6</sup>

This is remarkable because it sets in its proper context, both existential and political, the encounter between Salvador Allende and the cobbler Juan Demarchi. But also because it helps us to grasp the extent to which weavers and popular musicians such as the Yarur workers – who went from operating Chile's largest cotton mill in the 1930s, to seizing control of the factory and gaining the political initiative in the 1960s – or the folk singer Víctor Jara forged the Chilean Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s from below.

As Peter Winn, responsible for the most exhaustive account of what he calls the Chilean 'revolution from below', observes, that movement extended from the shoemakers, weavers, poets and musicians to other areas of social creativity and production, such as factory labour, mural painting and literature.<sup>7</sup> As the life and work of the poet and Nobel Prize winner Pablo Neruda attests, the creativity of this movement from below also made possible legal as well as political change. This is so not because of some underlying necessity or historical rule, but because what is at stake in particularly



urgent historical situations such as this one is existence itself, and there is no stake higher.

Only that kind of particular urgency, accompanied by a more generic sense that what is at issue is existence itself, awakens in us the spirit that can take us beyond the sinful entrapment of apathy and melancholia that Dante Alighieri called *accidia*.<sup>8</sup> That powerful combination becomes embodied in the kind of political organisation that activists often call a front or a popular block, to be distinguished from the more vertical relation between leader and people that usually goes by the name of representation or populism. These were some of the lifelong lessons that Allende learned early on, from Demarchi and others, and that he consistently applied throughout his political praxis and his life as both dreamer and militant.

Political shoemakers such as Juan Demarchi were quite a visible presence at the end of the nineteenth century. The first anarchist ever recorded in a provincial town (Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil, 1891) was, precisely, an Italian shoemaker. The only craft union reported as participating in the first Workers' Congress in Curitiba was the Shoemakers' Association, as Hobsbawm observes. Certainly, militancy and left-wing activism alone did not distinguish cobblers and shoemakers from some other craftsmen who were, as a group, as prominent in the events of the 1848 German Revolution or in France during the revolts against the July monarchy. In 1850 Joseph Weydemeyer wrote to Karl Marx to inform him that 'the Workers Club [also known as the Communist league] is small and consists only of shoemakers and tailors', but the latter were more prominent.<sup>9</sup> The same would happen during the Chilean Revolution of the 1960s–70s, in which weavers would become more prominent than most other groups active in the revolution from below.<sup>10</sup>

What gave shoemakers their radical reputation was not their prominence in collective action; it was the fact that they were well established as worker intellectuals. Their role as spokespersons and organisers of common folk is well documented, from the 1830 'Swing' Riots in England and the French 'worker-poets' of 1850 to



the organisation of the Federation of Workers of the Argentine Region in 1890.

Hobsbawm attributes their reputation as popular philosophers to their independence – the solitude of their work, its physically undemanding character requiring little or no division of labour – and the material conditions of their trade, which in turn explain their ability to become the village's politician. In addition, according to the English historian, the humble status of their trade and their relative poverty help make sense of their proverbial radicalism.

Agreeing with such a depiction of political shoemakers, E. P. Thompson quotes a Yorkshire satirist's portrayal of the village politician as:

typically, a cobbler, an old man and the sage of his industrial village: He has a library that he rather prides himself upon. It is a strange collection . . . There is the 'Pearl of Great Price' and Cobbett's 'Twopenny Trash' . . . 'The Wrongs of Labour' and 'The Rights of Man', 'The History of the French Revolution' and Bunyan's 'Holy War' . . . It warms his old heart like a quart of old ale when he hears of a successful revolution – a throne tumbled, kings flying and princes scattered abroad.<sup>11</sup>

Thompson's would have been a very good description of the anarchist cobbler of Valparaíso and his strange collection of books. Demarchi comes across as an almost fictive character in 1900s Chile, but he was nevertheless very real and decisive in the life of Salvador Allende, according to his own account. He taught Allende the most important lesson of his life.

The lesson was this: in Latin America, as pretty much everywhere else, there thrives the notion that cobblers, tailors, weavers and the like, as well as indigenous peoples and the sons and daughters of former slaves, do not possess a culture of their own; they are not civilised or literate enough to make full use in the future of the fruits of their own labour, let alone to govern themselves. So they

must labour for others and be governed. Literacy implied civilisation, which entailed the right to govern others and benefit from their efforts as ‘brutes of labour’.<sup>12</sup> Put otherwise, with the added moral rectitude of Victorian or Catholic righteousness, it was assumed that the more advanced in the world, or among a certain population, had an obligation to assist the backward and civilise the savage. Such an ethical duty, wedded to cosmopolitan sentiments of sympathy and benevolence, suited the needs of empire.

The whole of the Americas had been represented in terms of such a mould during the 1550 debates that took place in Valladolid, Spain: as a vast space lacking the basic traits of civilisation, chief among them the ability to accumulate and plan for the uncertain future, and thus in need of the ways and values of Renaissance Europe.<sup>13</sup> This narrative that identifies two sorts of people in the world – the diligent, intelligent and above all frugal elite who shall inherit the earth, and the improvident who squander what they have on mere enjoyment – created the framework of all modern imperialisms and justified them. By the time of Allende’s birth in 1908, people like Diego Portales, a merchant from Valparaíso who became the country’s most prominent nineteenth-century politician, had decisively contributed to the foundation of the Chilean republic on the basis of that geopolitical and cultural representation: as a vast blank space in need of conquest and civilisation. That idea, and the motivations of foreign capital, help explain the expansion of Chile at the expense of Peru and Bolivia in the north and the Mapuche Indians in the south, as well as the internecine wars that in the late nineteenth century cleared the way for the political designs of Portales and others, which would endure well into the twentieth century, and with changes, into the twenty-first.

This is the political context in which Allende grew up, at a time in which the workers’ movement that emerged among the miners and industry of the north and the Mapuche resistance that continued in the south began to challenge the state of affairs established by people like Portales. That situation was clearly defined by Portales



himself in a letter written at the time, in which he defended the following idea:

This thing called democracy, which is claimed by dreamers of all kind, is an absurd notion in the countries of the Americas. Our nations are full of vices, and their citizens lack the necessary virtues to establish a true republic . . . As a system, republicanism is what we must adopt. However, do you wish to know how I conceive of it in countries such as this? A strong government, centralised, made of men who can be true models of virtue and patriotism, able to straighten our citizens so that they would follow the righteous path of order and virtue, and thus become part of the city. This is what I think, and every man of sense should think the same.<sup>14</sup>

The ideology expressed in Portales's letter is but a variation on the theme of the two sorts of people, now internalised in the settlers' self-image and transformed into the foundational narrative of Chile's republican constitution. Thus, the Chile in which Allende was born had been built upon two pillars: the imposition of a strong authority backed by force, on the one hand, and on the other the configuration of a group of white men – and they *were* only men (although behind them, as the stereotype goes, there were women ready to defend the stability of home, tradition and family) – virtuous, literate and capable of ruling over national politics for ever in exclusivity. These men, and the interests they served, configured the fate of Chile. That destiny, however, was entangled with the fate of a few resources: nitrates, copper and foreign capital.<sup>15</sup>

These men completed Portales's work after his death in 1837. Men like the Venezuelan grammarian and legal codifier Andrés Bello (perhaps the most influential jurist in nineteenth-century Latin America), Manuel Renjifo, Manuel Montt, Antonio Varas and the Argentinian Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, who contrasted the civilised world of enlightened Europe, where in their eyes

Employers in Chile and elsewhere in the Americas retaliated, pushing their governments towards ever more violent means of repression, or using their own, such as private security detachments or paramilitary groups like the Argentine Patriotic League. The Russian Revolution of 1917 further radicalised working-class and peasant grievances, provided new legal, economic and political tools for creating new knowledge, and multiplied tenfold the fears and anxieties of the propertied classes.

In Chile, post-war depression had been exacerbated by the fall in demand for nitrates and the development of a synthetic variety in Germany. Finding themselves out of work, the majority of Chile's labour force migrated south, away from the mines, in search of new opportunities, or clashed with the security forces of the state. Fifteen people were killed when security forces broke a strike in the town of Puerto Natales in February 1919. The recently established Chilean Workers' Federation (FOCH) gathered 100,000 people in Santiago that same year. Anarchist militancy increased, and the communist movement in Chile would become one of the most active in all Latin America, building on an older tradition of trade union activism in Chile's copper and nitrate industries. The situation was similar elsewhere: by 1910, three out of four adults in Argentina's capital Buenos Aires were migrants who had arrived in South America bringing with them new political ideas and militant narratives – among them communism, Marxism and anarcho-syndicalism. A different but no less important militancy had grown up among the Mapuche indigenous peoples of the south of Chile whose struggle had been going on for more than 300 years; the resistant *indianismo* of the Bolivians Juan Lero and Zárate Willka; the anti-slavery narratives from the coasts of Colombia and the north of Brazil; and the pioneering socialism of the Peruvian feminist and worker organiser Flora Tristán.

In 1896, the physician Juan B. Justo founded the Argentine Socialist Party; earlier on he had translated into Spanish Karl Marx's *Capital*. As had happened in Argentina and Chile, anarchism became



particularly influential in Bolivia between the 1920s and 1940s, though it had been present there since at least the end of the nineteenth century. Around the time of the Chaco War fought between Bolivia and Paraguay over assumed oil-rich territories in the 1930s, it shared the space of radical politics with canonical Marxism and, as was the case also in Peru, Venezuela and Chile, with a form of revolutionary nationalism that attracted members of the armed forces.<sup>18</sup>

The radical politics of this period in Latin America were also gendered: in 1914, the middle-class Alicia Moreau founded the Socialist Women's Centre while her upper-class counterpart Victoria Ocampo led the Argentinian suffragette movement. Less than ten years later, in Colombia, María Cano would lead the struggle for workers' and women's rights in the country and helped found the Socialist Revolutionary Party between 1925 and 1926. These women were walking in the footsteps of Flora Tristán over half a century earlier.

The elite in these countries responded to growing militancy and activism. On 21 July 1920, Chile's outgoing president Juan Luis Sanfuentes did what was expected of him when he ordered the security forces of the country to put a stop to a series of student uprisings in support of workers' activism, social and university reform taking place in the city of Santiago. The Students' Federation headquarters were destroyed and a young student poet named José Domingo Gómez was beaten and tortured. In 1922 the Communist Party of Chile was formed. Among its long-standing members was the poet and future Nobel Prize winner Neftalí Reyes, who became politicised after news of the brutal repression of the student uprisings in 1920 reached him in the southern town of Temuco, where he was the seventeen-year-old president of the local school's writers' society, known as *Ateneo Literario*, and secretary of the Students' Association. In the first article he signed as Pablo Neruda, a pen name inspired by the Czech author of a book of stories about the humble people of the *Malá Strana* neighbourhood in Prague, the poet expressed his anger at the unholy trinity of 'exploitation,



capital, and abuse'.<sup>19</sup> Provincial Temuco was the last heart of the Mapuche Indian resistance. One of Neruda's mentors there had been the village poet and popular intellectual Orlando Mason, editor of the town's daily newspaper *La Mañana*. Mason read his poetry in public recitals, where he also became well known as an outspoken critic of the Indian wars. 'Under the pretext of exterminating bandits,' he argued, 'the colonisers have dispossessed the native inhabitants of their land, and Indians were killed like rabbits.' After independence in 1810, Chileans of European descent 'devoted themselves to killing Indians with the same enthusiasm as the Spanish invaders'.<sup>20</sup> What Demarchi meant for Allende, Mason did for Neruda. The life and teachings of these popular intellectuals helped link the emerging struggle of the workers of the Chilean north with that of the Indians in the south, and the cyclical upheavals in the long duration of five hundred years of capitalism and conquest with the decisive bifurcation between popular power and rule by the powerful and the wealthy that began to take shape in the early twentieth century and would finally explode as a crisis at its latter end.<sup>21</sup>

Neruda's next stop was the university in Santiago, where the future Nobel Prize winner reflected in his poetry on what he called his 'feelings of repulsion towards the bourgeoisie', while identifying himself further with the restless, outraged people.<sup>22</sup> These people were the persecuted Indians, domestic servants, men in the mines and women in the mills, plantations and textile factories, the unemployed, prostitutes, artists and criminals, the same people identified later on, in the 1950s, by the Latin American thinker Frantz Fanon as all those 'who turned in circles between suicide and madness'.<sup>23</sup> These were the same people brought to the screen by Luis Buñuel in his celebrated 1950 Mexican film *Los Olvidados*, written about in the 1960s by the Mexican novelist and essayist José Revueltas, and turned into protagonists of history and political economy in the Chile of the 1970s by the German-American Andre Gunder Frank.<sup>24</sup>

Neruda's political awakening took a decisive turn during his years as a university student in the 1920s. He connected his motivations to the fate of the forgotten, as the latter suffered under the uneven impact of global capitalism, which allowed for the faster integration of some regions and sectors of society into global circuits of trade (said to be more 'central') to the detriment of others (said to be more 'peripheral') and confronted the state's forces. Allende made his debut in university politics in a similar context. As a member of the student movement *Avance*, he would speak of liberty, highlighting the plight of the leaderless proletariat as specific to Latin American reality and a crucial point of contrast with the dogmas repeated by the ideologues and cadres of orthodox Marxism and communist parties, which tended to exclude them using denigrating terms such as 'lumpenproletariat'.<sup>25</sup> After refusing to sign a manifesto proposed by the leaders of *Avance*, calling for the formation of Chilean soviets like those emerging in Russia after the 1917 revolution, Allende was expelled from the student group in 1931.

Allende argued that such rhetorical antics ignored the situation in Chile. He was referring to a blind spot in orthodox Marxist politics – the contradiction of exclusive inclusion, which it shares with forms of racism and sexism – and a relation to political practice that tends to view the future in the light of mechanical and deterministic perspectives. The canonical Marxism that troubled the young Allende corresponded to a dogmatic version of 'scientific socialism' according to which one class, the proletariat, embodies with full consciousness the necessary orientation of future history to the exclusion of other, less conscious sectors of society, especially the 'lumpenproletariat'.

In this respect at least, the version of Marxism that advocated the need for a historical vanguard at the helm of other, supposedly less conscious, sectors of the population was not so different from the conservative and liberal position that put the exclusive right to political agency, government and constitution-making into the hands of the literate or civilised classes. This was particularly



problematic in the countries of Latin America, given the history of political militancy originating from the plight of indigenous peoples and other sectors often seen as in need of leadership from without.

There is no need to read this issue anachronistically, as a question of multiculturalism or lack of it. But more importantly, it was not how the younger generation of the early twentieth century saw it. For them, it was a matter of realism as well as an existential judgement. Latin American reality could not be reduced to the simple dualities of a Manichean vision portrayed as the 'objective' history of class struggle, in accordance with the formulas regurgitated at the time by fat manuals published by the Soviet Academy. The past and current history of Latin America did not fit such clear-cut schemes; it could not be read as the product of clockwork mechanisms, but rather as the result of a series of encounters and misunderstandings between people, structures and institutions persisting over long periods – at once legal, geopolitical, cultural and economic. In such an uneven history, different turning points, clashes and confrontations were lived and enacted differently by diverse groups and individuals.

At first, people like Allende, Neruda, Fanon and others would speak of 'eliminating feudalism', or 'secularisation', or 'awakening the nation', evoking previous projects of liberation and independence, in the sense of clashes and readjustments within an enduring system. But in the two decades between the 1930s and 1950s, major crises ensued which threatened the enduring structures and relatively stable institutions of the post-colonial Americas. At that point in their lives, Allende, Neruda and others found themselves facing choices that were not only political but also existential.

Allende articulated the new situation in just such terms. He spoke of making a pledge or a promise, and of the 'arduous consistency' of maintaining such a promise.<sup>26</sup> Referring to his early experiences as a student activist in the Avance group, and the contrast he found there between following a ready-made theory or political dogma and devising a plan and sticking to it, he spoke of the 'arduous

No mechanistic historical narrative, based on the vulgar notion of inevitable progress common to some Marxists and most centrist Liberals, could account for such rifts. It is no coincidence that people like Neruda and Allende almost instinctively rejected such narratives in favour of more nuanced theories.

Crucially, those theories reflected upon the reality in which people like Neruda, Salvador Allende, Laura Allende, Carmen Lazo and others immersed themselves. Their experience in Chile would not be dissimilar to that of their contemporaries in Colombia. There, lower- and upper-middle-class young university students inspired by the Mexican and Russian revolutions would gather in the coffee houses and literary associations of the 1920s to form rebel groups such as *Los Nuevos*, which brought together the likes of Gabriel Turbay, María Cano, a Russian dyer recently arrived in Bogotá named Savinsky, and Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. The latter, although belonging to the lower castes, had distinguished himself through his speeches after the massacre of 16 March 1919. In 1924 some of them would go on to form a communist cell that met periodically in a church located in the Las Nieves quarter of Colombia's capital.

Let us thus observe the variety of rebellious rationalities that began to coalesce in Latin America between the 1920s and 1940s. Some of them, like anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism and Marxism, were more or less recent arrivals, dating back to the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. In Bolivia and Chile anarchism had been present since the late 1800s, managing to voice the experiences of European immigrants and the living memory and demands coming from the emerging working sectors of society in urban areas, associated with low-scale artisan and industrial labour and small businesses. The sociologist Álvaro García Linera observes that anarchism's influence became notable during the 1920s, 30s and 40s as it helped to organise horizontal federations of apprenticeships and labour associations, as well as contributing decisively to the autonomous formation of an egalitarian culture among its affiliates. As we



know, the young Allende would be exposed to this egalitarian tradition through his early contact with the working-class world of Valparaíso, embodied in the figure of the anarchist cobbler Demarchi.<sup>33</sup>

Though this kind of contact between members of the upper and working classes might seem unlikely, in fact there were several examples of it throughout Latin America. Many of these cases involved upper- and lower-middle-class women becoming aware of the plight of other women working in sectors where female labour was intensive and conditions inhumane, such as mining enclaves and the textile industry. This was the case of María Cano in the Colombian province of Antioquia, or Alicia Moreau in Buenos Aires.

Cano had been born to a well-off middle-class family imbued with the tradition of the radical enlightenment and liberalism during the years of intolerance, counter-reformation, 'regeneration', constitutionalism, and persecution of radicals and dissidents in late nineteenth-century Colombia. Internationally, the Mexican Revolution, anti-dictatorship and anti-imperialist struggles against the new expansionist policy and free-market adventurism of the post-1898 United States fired the imagination of these younger activists. They were also inspired by the literary work of other women like Gabriela Mistral, Alfonsina Storni, Juana de Ibarborou and Delmira Agostini, and deeply affected by the consequences of the First World War, the 1917 Russian Revolution and later on the Great Depression. Through her continual visits to the public library, María Cano went on to become a reader for groups of workers from whom she would learn about the lived experience of work as the class composition of Colombian society changed, and the autonomy and creativity of artisans was lost to the experience of rigorous control over the behaviour of workers in factories and workshops.

Some eighty-three years after the experience of workerist and gendered socialism pioneered by Flora Tristán in her 1843 essay



‘The Worker’s Union’, written between Peru and Britain, Cano, Carmen Lazo and Moreau would help to found socialist political organisations in Colombia, Chile and Argentina. In this more autochthonous tradition, socialism and radical liberalism were understood as implying the further development of civil liberties into economic and social liberties. Similarly, it was argued that political democracy and legal formal equality were necessary but insufficient, and needed to evolve into economic democracy and social equality.

The Socialist Party of Chile, for instance, was founded on this basis in the wake of the electoral result of 30 October 1932 and the fall of the short-lived Socialist Republic. In that election, the right-wing candidate Arturo Alessandri, who did not hide his sympathies for fascism, won 54.6 per cent of the vote while Grove, the leader of the Chilean Socialist Republic, obtained 17.7 per cent without the support of a proper party. That level of support convinced many on the left about the need for a political organisation more responsive to Chilean popular sentiment than to canonical dogmas and international directives. The worsening of the situation in Spain and the rest of Europe, the quarrel between Trotsky and Stalin, and later on the signature of the non-aggression pact between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, further strained existing differences between socialists and communists.

Among the founders of the Socialist Party were Colonel Marmaduke Grove, Oscar Schnake and his *Acción Revolucionaria Socialista*, the anarcho-syndicalist Eugenio González, Trotskyites expelled from the Communist Party, Carlos Martínez, Blanca Luz Brum and Salvador Allende.

Allende observed that when the Socialist Party of Chile was founded, the Communist Party appeared to them ‘more hermetic, closed-off, dogmatic’ and internationally dependent. However, the founders of the Socialist Party saw no essential incompatibility between their organisation and the Communist Party in terms of their shared philosophy and method of historical and social

analysis.<sup>34</sup> Allende's Socialist Party of Chile embraced Marxism while at the same time distancing itself from what Allende called at the time the 'sectarian and revolutionary immature stance that called for a dictatorship of the proletariat in our country',<sup>35</sup> and strongly rejected the cult of personality or *caudillismo* that had become fashionable on the left and the right of Europe between the 1920s and 1940s.

As we will see in the next chapter, European events were extremely influential in determining the different but intricately related destinies of socialists and communists in Chile. Chief among them was the Spanish Civil War, widely interpreted in Latin America as the starting point of the Second World War, and thereafter of the Cold War.

## The Owners of Chile

Political activism in times of repression is no easy task, but difficult circumstances have a way of inspiring people. During the 1940s and 1950s, as socialists and communists were forced underground by unjust laws and persecution, Carmen Lazo, better known as La Negra Lazo, came up with an inventive way of getting people together. She would bring a harmonica to political meetings. When people failed to show up, Carmen would get the harmonica out of her pocket and start playing as if she were a blues musician from the southern United States. At first, some kids would come, attracted by the music, and behind them the kids' mothers. Then the fathers would come. Soon enough a crowd of a few dozen people would form, dancing to the rhythms of *cueca* and *cumbia* coming out of Carmen's harmonica. Finally, the whole town would fill the square, ready to listen.

Now it was Salvador Allende's turn to keep the mood going. These were the early 1950s, and this was his first bid for the presidency of Chile as the popular coalition's candidate, the current incarnation of the anti-fascist Popular Front of the 1930s and 1940s, now known as the People's Front.

Given the prevailing climate of fear and persecution, for the Chilean Left to have made it this far was already an achievement. For leaders, activists and the people, to show up was itself an act of courage. In the post-war years, after the administration of President Gabriel González Videla turned against 'communism' in general



progressed through stages (from the Ancient East to the modern West), which made the South simultaneously invisible from the perspective of universal history, and an opportunity for the self-affirmation of (mostly Western) civilisation. Thus, southern republics internalised the tenets of progress – free trade, competition, positivist science and law, a work ethic, parsimonious austerity, consumerism and ‘hygiene’, a term that at the time referred to a particularly nineteenth-century mixture of biology, philosophies of regeneration and *élan vital*, eugenics and medicine. This new vitalism infused a particular understanding of the institutions of the state, law and society, chief among them the market, seen from that viewpoint both as the tool for peoples to transcend in time and as the space in which to do it. In the new paradigm, transcendence would be identified with the remaking or regeneration of entire populations. The term most often associated with that idea is ‘progress’, but there are others that share similar connotations, some more politically correct than others: advancement, regeneration, civilising mission or development.

The generation of Pablo Neruda, Salvador Allende and Carmen Lazo had witnessed the genocide of the Mapuche in Chile’s south and knew first-hand of the plight of displaced Indians, peasants and workers in the mining north. Often referred to by pejorative names such as *indios*, *rotos*, *plebe*, *morenos*, *cholos*, *mestizos* and other terms denoting backwardness, these people would usually be marked by skin colour or, more generally, simply referred to by a single label. Their very existence would be the cause of anxiety among the literate, the ‘civilised’ and the ruling classes. This is the part of society whose labour is needed in order to satisfy the normal desires of that society – to consume, to vote, to maintain order, respect property and follow the law, to keep the show running – but whose desire to affirm its own existence is constantly denied or disavowed: like foreign migrants in the global North, or peasants, indigenous peoples and the lower castes in the global South. In the 1950s, Buñuel turned his camera lens towards the innermost aspects of the legal, social and



political relation between the ruling classes of Latin America and those perceived as the rabble down below. In a series of films, mostly set in the slums and mansions of urban Mexico, Buñuel helped make visible the deep and affective relation of dependency between the people of the slums and those enjoying the benefits of progress, which the latter would not be ready to recognise, let alone to remedy.

The need to express the plight of those scraping a living on the border between city and slum, legality and illegality, humanity and the inhuman, inspired the writing and politics of people like Neruda or Allende. They learned from popular intellectuals that this was not simply a matter of progress or transcendence. Occasionally, they experienced that truth themselves. For people like Carmen Lazo, it had always been a matter of existence.

Lazo was born to poverty in the mining town of Chuquicamata, the biggest copper mine in the world, a hole in the desert so big that it has often been compared to a monster, swallowing countless men and women to produce 'the wages of Chile'. She belonged to a humble family with strong roots in the mining community of Potrerillos, Atacama, where her father had migrated in search of work. In Potrerillos she was a colleague of Manuel Ovalle, who would go on to become one of the founders of the Copper Workers' Confederation in the 1950s, and a leader of one of the most influential unions in Chile's history. After the family moved once more, to Valparaíso, displaced by economic and social circumstances, Carmen continued her studies. While in primary school, she heard the word 'socialism' from the lips of a teacher, also a woman and most probably a militant and a community organiser.

At thirteen years of age, Carmen joined the recently founded Socialist Party of Chile. She began her work around the gold and iron mines of the mountainous region of El Tofo, in the town of Coquimbo. Carmen would ride a mule into the areas where gold and iron miners worked under extremely harsh conditions with an issue of the party's newspaper *Consigna* under her arm. Once there,

she would read and discuss with them extracts from the news broadsheet, or debate the reasons why Ramsay MacDonald – the author of the only book she could find on the subject of socialism, and a critic of it – had got it all wrong.

On one occasion she was asked by the party director of the Tofo region to write a speech that would be read before a congregation of some 2,000 workers. Present at that meeting were also the founders of the party, Marmaduke Grove, Oscar Schnake, the young Salvador Allende and the Uruguayan poet Blanca Luz Brum. ‘She was extraordinarily beautiful,’ Lazo says, ‘... tall, blonde, green eyes. She crossed her legs up on stage and the men were going crazy, she had them eating from the palm of her hand; she was definitely in charge of the whole affair.’ When the moment came for Carmen to read the speech she froze. ‘I couldn’t see the words on the page,’ she recalls. ‘Then Blanca Luz turned to me and said: “Girl, lose the papers and improvise.” That’s what I’ve been doing ever since.’<sup>2</sup>

Blanca Luz Brum had been born to escape. No wall was tall enough, no boundary could stop her; no gender or sexual convention would have the power to tame her desire. Defying laws and social conventions, the seventeen-year-old Blanca Luz escaped on a motorbike from a nuns’ convent in Montevideo with a Peruvian poet. They married, had a child and lived together until his death three years later. Widowed, and wishing for her son to see the land of his father, the poet Juan Parra del Riego, she and her son moved to Lima, where she befriended José Carlos Mariátegui. A Peruvian pioneer of the cause of the indigenous peoples of the Andes who, ‘nauseated by creole politics’, had turned to socialism, Mariátegui went on to become one of the most original interpreters of Marxism, often compared with Antonio Gramsci and M. N. Roy.<sup>3</sup> Blanca Luz began writing for Mariátegui’s journal *Amauta*, and edited a journal of her own titled *Guerrilla: Atalaya de la Revolución*, which published ‘rupturist poetry’ – which aimed to make a break with traditional literatures centred on the figure of the epic warrior or the



soldier, and focused instead on disrupting the narrative chain of mainstream language – essays and social commentary.

In the course of a meeting of union organisers in Montevideo in 1929 Blanca Luz met David Alfaro Siqueiros, the famous Mexican muralist and staunch communist. They fell madly in love and during the time of their passionate relationship they got involved in political militancy, the avant-garde and according to some even plotting and political assassination. They spent time in jail, and became part of a circle in Mexico that included, among others, Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Augusto Sandino, Tina Modotti, Pablo Neruda and his beloved friend Federico García Lorca.

The reach of that circle was global in more than one sense. Not only did it include writers, muralists and painters, but also filmmakers like Sergei Eisenstein and Luis Buñuel, a close friend of Lorca, whom he had met while studying philosophy at the University of Madrid. It also reached as far as Egypt, where members of the Art and Liberty group would develop their own work in dialogue with the Mexican group. In the early 1920s, Buñuel, Lorca and Salvador Dalí were at the heart of a new cultural movement centred on the image, searching for new spaces of freedom and other scenes of interiority and expression. ‘Images’, Buñuel concluded at the time, ‘did become for me the true means of expression.’<sup>4</sup>

By the 1930s, Buñuel’s films had enraged both the fascists and the Catholic Church, which denounced his imagery as both communist and heretical. His 1932 film *Las Hurdes: Tierra Sin Pan* focused on the grim circumstances of poverty and peasant life in Extremadura. It used a combination of the languages of ethnography and the written press, travelogues and new pedagogic methods as well as a subversive use of sound, photography and documentary, which laid the basis for a contemporary and creative view of the masses directly opposed to their dismissive portrayal in the past.<sup>5</sup> The image, both in painting and film, was central to the aim of portraying and enhancing the existence and importance of ‘the people’, the rabble, the forgotten peasantry and the lumpen as the other scene and

underside of society, not only as a stage in which the dramas of childhood or the traditional past are constantly played and replayed but also, crucially, as society's productive unconscious.

It was among the people, no matter how dismissed and invisible from the top of the social pyramid, that desire could be encountered, explored and manifested in all its radical nature, and therefore also in terms of its political actuality. For Buñuel and others of his mind, desire took the concrete shape of a multi-layered voice, a montage, or a stereoscopic image. They imagined memory and creative desire in the shape of the strata of the mine at Chuquicamata, or like an inverted Mexican pyramid, a juxtaposition of narratives and oral traditions of remembrance and storytelling, and a creative hub of experimentation on the basis of a multiplicity of stored practices.

It is no accident that in circles like the one frequented by Buñuel, Eisenstein, Lorca, Carmen Lazo, Nicanor Parra, Pablo Neruda, García Lorca and others in Mexico and Chile, and elsewhere in Latin America during the effervescent decades spanning the 1930s to the 1960s, the question of existence and the desire of the people, so often dismissed as a mark of backwardness and an obstacle to progress, would be explored and celebrated instead as the untapped source of energies barely understood. Surrealist, rupturist, Marxist and cannibalistic perspectives – in the sense given to that term by the Brazilian poet Oswald de Andrade and the Colombian writer Gabriel García Márquez – were brought to bear on the issue and provided a whole new landscape of meaning, aesthetic as well as legal and political. Such new perspectives were deeply wedded to a love of life lived to the fullest, freedom, and an engaged practice of ethics inseparable from politics.<sup>6</sup>

Such was the case for Blanca Luz Brum, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Luis Buñuel and Lorca in Mexico and Spain, the painter Roberto Matta or Pablo Neruda and Carmen Lazo in Chile, or Oswald de Andrade in Brazil, among others. Love and life lived to the fullest. It is perhaps in this sense that we may recall, with Pablo



audiences at the time, the apparently more docile Puerto Ricans and Dominicans were constantly feminised and infantilised – as needing and desiring US virile or fatherly guidance and rule – while the radical actuality of the early Cuban liberation movement, led by the writer and nationalist intellectual José Martí, and its potential for years to come, were represented in a cartoon published by the *Chicago Inter Ocean* in 1905 as a raucous black child in poor clothing and no shoes, armed with gun and dagger, aptly named Revolt.<sup>10</sup> The Cuban guerrillas of the Sierra Maestra, both Black and Latino, bore out this dangerous potential in the eyes of stunned Americans between 1956 and 1959.

If we take stock of the panic created by the Soviet achievements of October 1957, and the contrast between these and the racial and economic tensions bubbling beneath the surface of American superiority – pointed out by Radio Moscow's announcements every time Sputnik passed over Little Rock<sup>11</sup> – we can get a better sense of the profound impact caused in the US and abroad, especially in Latin America, by the victory of Castro, Guevara and the Afro-Cuban Juan Almeida.

The early Soviet victory in space certainly shook the American establishment. The bearded Latino and black Cuban rebels beating the US and leaving them open to 'communist' (even nuclear) attack ninety miles from the Florida Keys was perceived as an earthquake north and south of the border. For all the deeds that could be attributed to Cuban revolutionaries, and condemned morally or otherwise – repression, the purges and executions of opponents after summary trials at La Cabaña headquarters, overseen by Guevara and executed by the American freebooter Herman Marks, and so on – none had as much historical and political import as the impact of the revolution on a US confidence already shaken by Soviet achievement, Chinese involvement in the Korean War, and the domestic and foreign policy crises of the first half of the 1950s. Up north, anxiety turned into full-blown panic and readiness to unleash the Furies. Down south, the perception

of an opening in history was interpreted as a practical lesson: ‘a people united, a people conscious of their historical task, goal and responsibility are invincible,’ as Salvador Allende put it when reflecting on his encounter with Guevara and Castro after the revolution.<sup>12</sup>

When Allende arrived on 20 January 1959, Havana was a party. On the radio could be heard the notes and verses of Orquesta Típica Loyola’s ‘Guagancó miliciano’ and Quinteto Rebelde’s ‘Que se vaya el mono’ (Que se vaya el mono/no lo quiero ver/porque todo’ en Cuba/estamo’ con Fidel! Hey blondie, you gotta go/I don’t want to see you no more/’cause here in Cuba we’re all with Fidel!). Pablo Neruda, whose book of poems *Canto General* Che Guevara would carry with him everywhere, dedicated ‘Canción de gesta’ and ‘Pasaron los años’ to the victorious revolution. In the streets, the effervescence caused by the defeat of the dictator Batista was still very much alive.

On the afternoon of his arrival, Allende got a phone call from Aleida March, Che’s lover and secretary. ‘Comandante Guevara wants to see you. He’s going to send a car to pick you up,’ she said.<sup>13</sup> The historical encounter between these two men took place at the military headquarters of La Cabaña. Allende himself described the scene in cinematographic detail to the French writer and philosopher Régis Debray:

When I arrived Che was lying on a campaign rollaway, he had only his fatigue trousers on. Naked from the waist up he was trying to recover from an acute asthma attack with the help of an inhaler. I sat on the bed, beside him, and waited for him to regain his breath. ‘Comandante,’ I began to say, and he interrupted me: ‘Allende, you see, I know very well who you are.’<sup>14</sup>

In January 1952 a twenty-three-year-old Ernesto Guevara had heard Allende speaking during the perilous presidential campaign that he, La Negra Lazo and other leftists undertook during a time



of persecution. Then a medical student in Buenos Aires, Guevara set off from the Argentinian capital with his friend Alberto Granado astride a 1939 Norton 500cc motorcycle, which they had named 'The Mighty One'. 'This isn't a tale of derring-do,' wrote Guevara in his memoir of the trip. 'It's a chunk of two lives running parallel for a while, with common aspirations and similar dreams.' Their exuberant plan was to cross into Chile and make it all the way north to Peru, where they would spend a few weeks working as volunteers at the San Pablo leper colony on the banks of the Amazon River.

It was to become an inner journey of huge importance, a coming-of-age story as much as one of coming into consciousness, an existential odyssey as well as a quest to the farthest reaches of the continent and back. 'In nine months a man can think a lot of thoughts, from the height of philosophical conjecture to the most abject longing for a bowl of soup – in perfect harmony with the state of his stomach,' Guevara said.<sup>15</sup>

In February 1952 the two friends travelled from Bariloche to Temuco, the place of Pablo Neruda's childhood that was also the ancestral home of the People of the Land in the Chilean south, the legendary indigenous Mapuche. Upon entering Temuco, the young men introduced themselves to a local newspaper called *El Austral* as internationally renowned physicians. The journalist in charge wrote a glowing article, which helped them score a few meals and a bed here and there as they made it to the desert up north.<sup>16</sup>

On the way to the copper mine of Chuquicamata, Ernesto and Alberto met a couple; they were workers, communists escaping persecution. 'By the light of a single candle we used to drink mate and share some cheese and a piece of bread,' Ernesto wrote of their encounter. 'The pinched features of this humble working man gave off a mysterious and tragic air . . . the couple, frozen stiff in the desert night, hugging one another, were a live representation of the workers anywhere in the world.' For the first time in his life,



similar: imagining the copper mine at Chuquicamata as a desert monster at the centre of an imperial war over resources with religious overtones.<sup>22</sup> Such imaginings reflected on the reality of places like Chile in the 1960s and 1970s, dependent on the fate of their natural resources in the global market and the decisions made by global state and non-state powers, such as multinationals and their local beneficiaries or opponents, battling against each other with a ferocity of conviction over the absolute righteousness of their own cause and the absolute error of the enemy's.

Chile produced over 20 per cent of all the copper in the world. The metal's value had risen in the 1950s due to its importance to the weapons industry at a time of growing tension between the super-powers and within America. Guevara speaks of 'pre-war'.<sup>23</sup> He was talking about the Cold War. US General Curtis LeMay, the notorious mastermind behind the terror firebombing of Japanese cities in the Second World War, had declared in 1948: 'We are at war now!' LeMay was not talking about fascism; he had communism in his sights.

In *The Motorcycle Diaries*, the young Che Guevara began to reflect upon the way in which the rising stakes at the international level, especially within the US and in relation to Eastern Communism, could impact Latin America. Thus, for example, he made the connection between the hike in the price of copper and the global situation with local Chilean debates concerning the fate of the workers in the copper mines. 'There is in this country a political and economic battle between those who advocate the nationalisation of the copper mines, including nationalists and the Left,' he observed, 'and on the other side those who, based on the ideal of free enterprise, prefer to have efficiently run mines (even if they are in foreign hands) to the uncertainty of having them managed by the dubious expertise of the state.' To the climate of 'pre-war' – Guevara's term for the looming conflict between the powers of the Cold War era, and the escalation of hostilities at the global level – corresponds an economic and

political battle at the local level mirroring, in a distorted and uneven manner that included warped perceptions of status and race, the battle lines between the capitalists and the various forms of protest on the left.<sup>24</sup>

At the time of Guevara's journey through Latin America, global tensions, warped perceptions and paranoid fears within the US and abroad had literally reached the point of madness. 'The Russians are coming!' shouted the former US Secretary of Defense and fierce anti-communist James Forrestal, before jumping, 'out of his mind', from the sixteenth-floor room he occupied at Bethesda Naval Hospital in 1949.<sup>25</sup> Two weeks after US President Harry Truman announced his insane decision to build an even deadlier hydrogen bomb on 31 January 1950, Albert Einstein appeared on Eleanor Roosevelt's television show to warn: 'if these efforts should prove successful . . . annihilation of all life on Earth will have been brought within the range of what is technically possible.'<sup>26</sup> In February that year, the little-known Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy told the Ohio County Women's Republican Club he had a list of 57 to 205 names 'known to the Secretary of State as being members of the Communist Party' who had infiltrated the federal government, making explicit the way in which tensions abroad had triggered another wave of Red-baiting and hatred in the USA and elsewhere. By the time McCarthy and FBI director J. Edgar Hoover were done, the US Left had been decimated, labour unions, popular movements and cultural associations that proved crucial to the reforms of the New Deal in the 1930s and 1940s were eviscerated, and many – for instance, the American trade union movement – would never recover. Other bodies, such as the African-American Civil Rights movement, were put under sufficient pressure as to feel forced to expel civil rights pioneers such as Paul Robeson and W. E. B. du Bois, who were joining all the dots, at home and abroad. Du Bois was purged for having supported the campaign of the progressive candidate Henry



Wallace and called for the UN to address racism in America.

Under the guise of that most sacred word in our political lexicon, 'security', and in tune with the Red Scare, government agencies in the US also purged gays and lesbians from federal offices and extended their persecution into the private sector.<sup>27</sup> With the invasion of South Korea by North Korea on 24 June 1950, and the entry of the Communist Chinese into the conflict (provoking the frantic retreat of General Marshall's US forces in November), war by proxy between Soviets and Americans, and between Eastern Communism and America and its Western allies, became a reality, drawing at least one Latin American country, Colombia, into the cauldron. In his December 1950 Nobel Prize speech, the writer William Faulkner cautioned: 'There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up?'<sup>28</sup>

This was the mad reality that the young Guevara summed up under the term 'pre-war', in connection with the battle lines being drawn in Chile in the 1950s. It is also in the context of such economic and political battles that he referred to Salvador Allende's position at the bottom of the pile in the 1952 Chilean presidential campaign. Allende was 'supported by the communists, whose electoral base has been reduced by 40,000, the number of names struck from the electoral register because of their militancy in the party', he wrote. He was referring to the political consequences of the Damned Law, a direct result of America's anxiety.<sup>29</sup>

'I know very well who you are,' a grown-up Che Guevara would say to an already seasoned Salvador Allende during their encounter after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in January 1959. 'I heard two of your speeches during the presidential campaign of 1952, one of the speeches was very good, and the other very bad. So we can talk without qualms, in confidence, because I have a very clear opinion of who you are.'<sup>30</sup>

During his childhood, Guevara had helped out refugees fleeing persecution from Republican Spain and stood up to



pro-Nazi teachers and professors. In December 1953, having completed his motorcycle journey through South America, Guevara arrived in Guatemala to breathe in the feverish atmosphere described by Gore Vidal in his novel *Dark Green, Bright Red*. There, he began to act following his newly made-up mind by working as a 'barefoot doctor' among the peasants. One of them was an elderly washerwoman, to whom he wrote a poem that evokes the image of the couple in the Chilean desert. In the poem, Guevara made 'a promise to fight for a better world for all the poor and exploited', similar to the one made by Allende during his father's funeral.<sup>31</sup>

He fell in with other young rebel souls seeking refuge from lost battles against the dictatorships of Somoza, Trujillo and Batista. Among them were some exiled Cubans who had participated the previous July in the failed but already famous attack led by Fidel Castro on the Moncada barracks. Castro had been arrested and put on trial. A lawyer, Castro defended himself. He pronounced the now famous claim: 'La historia me absolverá'. Together with the group of exiled Cubans was Hilda Gadea – the first female secretary of the economy of the Executive of Peru's Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA), another refugee escaping to Guatemala from the dictator General Odría. Guevara read Einstein in English with her, along with Russian psychology, Lenin and Marx.

Hilda schooled Guevara in the Marxist literature that he had so far paid only scant attention to, preferring Freud instead. The real lesson came in late January 1954 when word leaked out that the US, which had propped up all the other dictators in the Latin American continent on the pretext of forestalling a communist takeover, was now training an invasion force bent on overthrowing the democratically elected government of Jacobo Árbenz. Árbenz, handsome and charismatic, who had declared that 'all the riches of Guatemala are not as important as the life, the freedom, the dignity, the health and the happiness of the most humble of its people', was for his

words and his sins branded in the American media a communist, even before he had the time to implement his reform agenda. His words we know, and for those the *New York Times* decried him in June 1951 as ‘The Guatemalan Cancer’. His sins consisted in having had the courage to challenge the almighty United Fruit Company, called ‘the Octopus’ by Guatemalans, which controlled the country’s economy.

In an extraordinary turn of events, Edward Louis Bernays, the nephew of Sigmund Freud, one of the real-life Mad Men, founding father of the discipline of Public Relations and author of *The Engineering of Consent*, who also sat on the US Committee of Public Information, launched a campaign to brand Árbenz a communist in all major American media. It was in the context of such efforts, and in reference to the United Fruit Company’s sway over the corrupt governments that previously ruled in Guatemala and other Central American countries, that the term ‘banana republic’ originated.<sup>32</sup>

On the heels of their success in 1953 in overthrowing the government of Mohammed Mossadeq in Iran, accused of being both a communist and a Jew after nationalising British oil interests and confronting economic warfare, CIA director Allen Dulles launched ‘Operation Success’ against Guatemala. It helped that Allen and his older brother, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, had written United Fruit’s agreements with Guatemala through their law firm, that Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs John Moors Cabot – whose brother Thomas had been president of the company – was a major shareholder, and that the head of the National Security Council (NSC), General Robert Cutler, had been chairman of the board. After Árbenz handed power to a military junta led by the US-trained Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, Dulles declared that the country had been saved from ‘communist imperialism’. He drew the lesson that after Iran and Guatemala it had been proven that covert operations could be used to topple popular or democratic reform governments with little cost to America’s reputation.



seeking to withdraw from, but rather by engaging with politics, law and the state.

This is where today's protest and occupy movements reconnect with those days, in the search for new economic answers in the face of crisis in the Americas and elsewhere. They all became, in their own way, new women and new men. For they all persevered, and none of them gave in to the paralysing grasp of complacency, guilt or melancholy.

'Che and I were close. I could say, I believe, that I was for him a friend,' Allende told Régis Debray. Expressing for Guevara the kind of affection a father would harbour for a son, Allende said: 'I loved him, respected him. Let me show you this photograph of his, dedicated to my daughters Carmen Paz, Isabel and Beatriz, "with the heartfelt feelings of the Cuban revolution and my brotherly love". You see, he was the object of this family's affection, and he knew it just as he knew my daughters.' Allende told Debray that his relationship with the Cuban revolutionaries, and with the new generation of Latin Americans that reflected on the impact of that event, was deep and powerful. 'I want to share with you something exceptional that I keep as a treasure, something that is priceless to me,' he said, as he reminisced about the meeting with the leaders of the Cuban Revolution in January 1959. 'There was this copy of *Guerrilla Warfare* on top of Che's desk that day. It must have been the second or third copy because, I guess, he gave the first one to Fidel . . . He wrote a dedication, there you have it, which reads thus: "to Salvador Allende, who searches for it, the same as me, through other means. With love, Che".'<sup>36</sup>

Were Guevara and Allende so different? Che's dedication referring to their different choice of means and Allende's constant emphasis on the diversity of their tactics and strategies suggests so. Their temperaments seem diametrically opposed. Guevara could never stay in one place long enough, always looking for the next battle; he belonged to a generation that after tasting victory came to think that history always sides with the nobler cause. Allende lived,



in Guatemala. When Kennedy asked about the scheme's chances of success, Allen Dulles assured him the invasion would inspire opposition to Castro in the island to rise up against him. Three days before the invading force landed at Bay of Pigs in April 1961, eight US B-26 bombers destroyed half the Cuban air force. Two of the invading ships belonged to the United Fruit Company. Against the calculations of Dulles's CIA, on the day of the invasion the Cuban army easily subdued the invaders, and the promised popular uprising never came. One hundred and fourteen men were killed and 1,189 captured, among them four US pilots under contract to the CIA.<sup>9</sup>

The fallout would be damning, and would determine the shape of things to come in the Americas. In Cuba, a series of show trials and the execution of the 'traitors of Playa Girón' took place, signalling a hardening of positions and ideological severity that would lead to much closer military and not only technical collaboration with the USSR. The subsequent exodus of upper- and middle-class Cubans to Miami and the general climate of uncertainty about the future of the revolution were brilliantly captured in Tomás Gutiérrez Alea's film *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968). In America, the *New York Times* declared that US 'hegemony . . . in the Western hemisphere is threatened for the first time in a century' as the Cuban Revolution offered a model for the rest of Latin America.<sup>10</sup>

Then, as soon as the post-mortems were done, Kennedy put his brother Robert in charge of the CIA's most crucial covert operations. In January 1962, Robert Kennedy told CIA head John McCone that overthrowing Castro was 'the top priority of the US government'.<sup>11</sup> Many in Latin America had interpreted the Alliance for Progress proposal as mere whitewash, aimed at repairing America's dented prestige. That is not strictly correct, given that Kennedy did seek to distance his foreign policy from the militarism of the Joint Chiefs 'sons of bitches' and 'those CIA bastards'.<sup>12</sup> But they were right in pointing out that the Alliance was a first step

towards isolating Cuba from the rest of Latin America, stalling any leftist advance in the region, and part of a plan to wreck Cuba's economy and overthrow or kill Castro. The plan, set in motion as early as November 1961, was called Operation Mongoose. 'My idea is to stir things up . . . with espionage, sabotage, general disorder, run and operated by Cubans themselves,' observed Robert Kennedy when outlining the policy. By any conceivable measure, this was a terror campaign against Cuba under the auspices of the US government.<sup>13</sup>

In March 1962 the Joint Chiefs were asked by the CIA counter-insurgency expert Edward Lansdale, under Kennedy's orders, to provide a 'description of pretexts to justify' US intervention. Brigadier General William Craig produced a list of suggestions that gave origin to an operation code-named Northwoods. The plan drawn up by the Joint Chiefs of Staff contemplated a wave of violent terrorism to be launched in Washington, Miami and elsewhere in the US which 'could be pointed at Cuban refugees seeking haven in the United States' and included blowing up a US ship in Guantanamo Bay and blaming Cuba; hijacking a US aircraft and then attributing the consequences to the Cuban government; sinking 'a boatload of Cubans en route to Florida (real or simulated)'; staging the Cuban shooting down of an American civilian airliner whose passengers could be 'a group of College students off on a holiday'; and 'exploding a few plastic bombs in carefully chosen spots' on the US mainland that would be pinned on Cuban agents. These were some among a number of other similarly sordid schemes.<sup>14</sup>

Although none of the Northwoods schemes were activated, the suspension of Cuba from the Organization of American States (OAS), the April 1962 two-week military exercise involving 40,000 US troops, the October 1962 announcement by the US of Operation Ortsac (Castro spelled backwards), a mock invasion by US Marines of a Caribbean island ending in regime change, and other such actions convinced Castro, Guevara and the Soviets that an invasion was imminent. What followed, in the context of responses and counter-responses to perceived threats, has been dubbed with



reason 'the most dangerous moment in human history'. The emplacement of Soviet nuclear missiles in Cuba was viewed by the Cuban leadership 'as a defensive measure', while the Soviets likened it to the US missiles placed on the USSR's Turkish border and in Western Europe.<sup>15</sup>

Castro and the Cubans feared most of all being left under a radioactive cloud after a US attack. General Curtis LeMay and the majority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff indeed favoured an air strike to destroy the missiles and he personally assured J. F. Kennedy there would be no Soviet response. Questioned by Kennedy, LeMay welcomed the possibility of not only overthrowing Castro but also obliterating the USSR. Kennedy worried that allowing the missiles to stay would have serious political consequences in Latin America and elsewhere, and confided to his brother Robert his fear of impeachment, or something worse, if he did not act decisively. They opted for a blockade, against the suggestion of the Chiefs and ex-President Eisenhower, who favoured a strike followed by an invasion. In fact, under international law both the blockade and the strike were acts of war, war crimes, and given the likely consequences, also crimes against humanity punishable under the Nuremberg principles.

The US and the USSR were heading inexorably towards nuclear war, soon their leaders would be unable to stop it, and Cuba and Latin America were right in the middle. The real madness of this scenario would be satirised a few years later by Stanley Kubrick's film *Dr Strangelove*.

On 27 October, all hell broke loose: a navy group led by the aircraft carrier USS *Randolph* dropped depth charges on a Russian B-59 submarine, carrying nuclear weapons. Panic ensued. Commander Valentin Savitsky, unable to reach the general staff, ordered his crew to prepare the nuclear torpedo as the lights went dark and the air inside the ship became toxic. 'We're going to blast them now! We will die but we will sink them all – We will not disgrace our navy,' he shouted. His second in command, Commander Vasili Arkhipov, managed to calm him down and persuaded him not to launch.



the Marshall Plan of American economic assistance to Britain and others after the Second World War) there is simply no place here for any serious consideration of remedial equality or justice for the plundered and vandalised subject peoples, and those subjected to the torture chambers and killing fields of the Cold War.

In lieu of this, Guevara argued that without fully demonstrating solidarity and support for the underdeveloped world, the socialist countries would not only be appeasing the forces of reaction 'but would actually become accomplices to those forces'.<sup>8</sup> Growth, development and economic independence come to signify in this alternative framework a new international common sense, a 'consciousness' apt for the 'new man' and 'new humanity' of Guevara's parlance.

This is different from and much more than an ethic of sentiment or benevolence, which is what the Cold War pragmatism in the Truman–Nixon tradition appeals to in its understanding of development as a suite of strategic gestures – varying from subtle diplomacy to blunt military assistance and intervention – of American or largely Western largesse driven by self-regarding moral considerations.

In concrete terms, in the environment of the late 1960s and early 1970s, this meant that 'the socialist countries must help pay for the development of countries now starting out on the road to liberation . . . a change in consciousness resulting in a new fraternal attitude towards humanity.'<sup>9</sup> According to such a view, economic exchanges between countries bonded in solidarity should not include 'mutually beneficial trade' based on prices imposed on developing countries by the laws operating in the global market and the relations of unequal exchange that force the latter to sell their raw materials at world market prices and to buy at such prices the machinery produced in the automated factories of the developed world. Foreign investments from fraternal countries should involve no payment or credit, and 'the supply of marketable goods on long-term credits' to poorer countries could be 'one form of aid not

requiring the contribution of freely convertible hard currency'.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, relations between fraternal countries would involve acquiring and sharing the latest technology without regard for the limits imposed by mainstream notions of patents and copyright.

These, and other related notions such as Frantz Fanon's idea that former coloniser and enslaver states must pay their due to plundered peoples in the global South just as Germany paid reparations to Israel after the war, constitute the precedent for current designs of concrete forms of remedial justice and equality as part of the reconstruction of human rights, and contemporary practices of solidarity economics between countries like Venezuela and Cuba or Nicaragua, just as they prefigured in their own time the development of new doctrines of compensation after nationalisation in international law. One example of such development would be the Allende Doctrine of 'excess profits', applied by the Chilean government in 1971 after the nationalisation of the copper industry in the hands of the multinational conglomerates Kennecott and Anaconda.

The practice of solidarity or 'proletarian internationalism', involving an understanding of economic and political norms entailing the possibility of creating one's future independent of the circumstances of the past and the current situation, an ethics of individual responsibility in global perspective, and a clear choice for the least favoured on the side of the law of life, richly informed the normative reconstruction of the idea of human rights as people's rights. It began in the late 1960s as a viable alternative to the human rights and militarised politics of the weak liberalism characteristic of the Truman–Nixon tradition, and closer to the strong liberalism of the Roosevelt–Kennedy tradition in North America. In the South this notion of rights as people's and human rights, followed from the histories of the specific struggles of the poor and the disenfranchised. Far from being a poisoned or phoney gift of the European Enlightenment, it constitutes in the opinion of the Indian human rights scholar Upendra Baxi 'a live legacy of their authorship by suffering peoples and communities in struggle'.<sup>11</sup>



Speaking in 1962, Allende described in very similar terms the experience of the Socialist Party:

the Socialist Party was born in Chile thirty years ago in response to a specific social reality of evident inequality and disenfranchisement. This allowed us to gather an ample and diverse set of the sectors of society, principally workers, but also peasants and middle-class people in a movement responsive to our typical circumstances, in accordance with Chile's situation, and autonomous from any command from abroad. Rather, it has been oriented towards the notion that the Chilean people can achieve economic independence and social justice.<sup>12</sup>

Referring to what Guevara had called 'non-capitalist' or 'moral' incentives – which the latter had proposed since the early 1960s as a way to upset the primacy of individualist law, competitive logic and the use of consumer goods as a psychological moulder of consciousness – Allende observed: 'The Cuban people are today a different people, they're masters of their own destiny. They have gathered and fused together anew, around notions of work as a common task and a social duty, of emulation and voluntary labour.' Invoking an image from his teenage years, this time applied to the daily and perhaps unglamorous tasks of keeping the revolution alive, feed the people, clothe them, and allow them to benefit fully from their own efforts, Allende explained that in Cuba 'the university lecturer and the peasant, the student and the professional, the intellectual and the worker, are coming together in the crucible of [the moral transformation of] the nation.'<sup>13</sup>

After the Missile Crisis, Guevara became highly critical of the contradiction between militarised international relations and solidarity and investment in civilian production, particularly in the socialist countries that kept falling behind in terms of technological innovation for non-military purposes. He observed that: 'the error of not having acquired the highest technology at a given moment



This subjective conception of law and power relations is much closer to the understanding of the muralist *Brigadistas* and creative activists engaged in the politics of Chile in the late 1960s and 1970s. They understood their relation with city streets, walls and public spaces, but also with communication, as an inner space as much as an external landscape. The ‘new man’ and the new political culture they sought to bring about, together with Allende, was in this sense not only interpersonal but also infra-personal and extra-personal. In other words, their aim was to produce a new collective assemblage, a new set, and a subjectivity that would be both more human and more than human. This concept is the key to making sense of the fascination that the emerging sciences of automation and self-regulated activity – for instance cybernetics, the study of self-regulated artificial, biological and social systems, and the exploration of the concurrent forms of behaviour evident in the activity of larger groups – exercised in the minds of many among those engaged in the Chilean Revolution, including Allende. This is the new subject depicted in Matta’s *The First Goal of the Chilean People*. It is also the wider conception of subjectivity, law and revolution encapsulated in Guevara’s notion of the ‘new man’, which Allende made his own and placed at the heart of his promise to the Chilean people.

Concretely speaking, Allende’s promise meant: meaningful agrarian reform; full nationalisation of various industries – for instance mining and finance, but also the media – that since the nineteenth century had been exclusively in the hands of multinational corporations and their local beneficiaries; and the re-articulation of social as well as foreign relations (including economic relations) in terms of solidarity and remedial or reparative global justice. His Christian Democrat opponent in the 1970 election, Radomiro Tomic, standing on behalf of an exhausted governing Christian Democratic Party, ran on a platform that according to Greg Grandin was ‘not dissimilar to Allende’s’.<sup>12</sup>

As a result of this convergence between Allende’s and Tomic’s programmes, almost 2 million Chileans, 64.1 per cent of the

electorate, voted to raise the minimum wage, to increase spending on education, healthcare and pensions, to distribute large haciendas and *fundos* or landholdings to their original indigenous custodians and to peasants, and to deepen participatory democracy both within the state and at the level of communication and economic production, which included nationalisation as well as the overhaul of the rules of international and economic relations, compensation and so on, as well as the creation of new spaces of deliberation and expression. Out of that wider support for the programme of change, Allende obtained 36.3 per cent of the vote, and Tomic 27.8 per cent.

In a reversal of the situation in 1958 – when Alessandri had won by a slim margin of some 30,000 votes – this time Allende came out ahead of the right-wing candidate by almost 40,000 votes. Allende won in the areas of the country with the highest concentration of workers and peasants, with high percentages in Tarapacá (48.8 per cent), Antofagasta (45.9 per cent), Concepción (48.3 per cent) and in the traditionally indigenous area of Arauco (55.7 per cent). He lost in the two biggest cities: to Alessandri in Santiago, and to Tomic in Valparaíso. His weakness was the female literate vote: he obtained only 30.5 per cent of the women's vote, compared with 41.6 per cent among men. But Allende's overall support was consistent: only in the Cautín province did his vote fall below 29 per cent.

Did Allende misinterpret his mandate, launching too radical a programme for reform without wider electoral support? One way of answering this question is to compare it with the British situation. Today's ruling party in Britain, the Conservative Party, obtained in the last general election of 2010 only 36.1 per cent of the electoral vote, slightly less than Allende did in 1970. And yet, in the opinion of many, it is carrying out a programme of reform more radical than that put into practice by Margaret Thatcher. It is also the case that during the two most recent general elections in British history, the parties allowed to form a government have done so with an average support of only a third of the electorate. In 2005,



for instance, the Labour Party had obtained 35.2 per cent of the vote against 32.4 per cent for the Conservatives.<sup>13</sup>

Under the rules of the British Constitution, if none of the parties obtain a clear majority they must prove their capacity to gather wider support in the House of Commons, and subject to the approval of the monarch they may go on to form a government. Hence the current coalition government, which comprises the Conservative winners in the election and the Liberal Democrats who had come third in 2010 with 23 per cent of the vote. Something similar happened under the rules of the Chilean Constitution in 1970. Given that none of the parties obtained a clear and absolute majority, and in the absence of a monarch, it falls to the National Congress to establish which of the two parties with the highest support – in this case Allende's UP and Alessandri's Nationalists – may form a government, rule the country, and legitimately carry out its programme until the end of the constitutional term. In Chile, the conventional rule commands that the candidate who has gained the majority of popular votes should be allowed by Congress to form a government, just as in the most recent British general election it was widely accepted that the Conservatives who had gained the majority of the votes should have the first crack at forming a government. Nevertheless, it was crucial for the UP to obtain the support of the twenty Senators and fifty-five Congress deputies of the PDC to secure Allende's designation as president.

On 5 September, the third contender and PDC candidate Radomiro Tomic visited Allende in his residence, and recognised his victory and legitimacy in writing. In the afternoon, Allende gave a press conference expressing his gratitude for Tomic's support and his recognition of the UP's victory and legitimacy to form a government. This seemingly symbolic act can be interpreted as an analogy with the British conventions that guide the conversations, visits and expressions of support between party leaders after a 'hung parliament' leading to the formation of coalition governments; these